

MIGRATION AND POVERTY: LINKAGES, KNOWLEDGE GAPS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS¹

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This paper explores links between migration and poverty, and their implications for social policy. It argues that research on linkages between migration and poverty can, and should, start with knowledge about poverty itself: what it is, what causes it, what reduces it, poor people’s agency as well as constraints, and so on. Poverty research offers several established understandings on the natures, structures and processes driving poverty, and these should be central to how the issues are framed in migration research and policy. We argue that context-dependency rather than generalized conclusions are the main way forward. This could help develop migration research that is more strongly poor-centric, and consequently, move migration debates and policies toward issues more favourable and relevant to the poor.

The paper focuses on migration by the poorest, on internal migration, international South-South migration and child migrants. Studying migration with insights from poverty-research broadens the current research and policy focus, both in terms of the types of migration, and types of migrants studied. Much of the migration of the poorest is not seriously recognised, and nor are major categories of the poorest migrants. It is often asserted that the poorest do not want to or cannot migrate, or migrate only in exceptional circumstances and crises. Empirical research has tended to apply limited definitions of migration (such as into high-income countries), or be based on sources of information that tend to describe better-off or skilled migration more than others, thus omitting the many other types of migration that the poorest do undertake.² Moreover, migration tends to be defined as an adult activity, thus underplaying how migration affects – and is undertaken by – children.

Such neglect of the poor has existed in other areas of development research. For example, there was a long-standing view that the poor were unbankable, and did not want, or were unable to use, financial services (see Yaqub 1998 for review). Empirical research has shown, first, that much of the financial activity of the poor was unrecognized, occurring informally with traders and landowners, rather than through the types of financial intermediaries that got the most research, such as formal banking systems. Second, perspectives that included the poor needed to draw insights from the complexity of poor people’s lives; this led to better theorization of how financial sectors in developing countries worked, and not the other way around. Third,

¹ The views expressed in this paper are the authors’ and do not necessarily reflect official positions of DfID or UNICEF. The sections on children draw on conference papers by Shahin, and Eva Jespersen gave helpful ideas on those.

² We do not claim the poor migrate as often as the non-poor, although the point requires greater empirical investigation. But there are different forms of migration with different costs and rewards, and the poor are associated more with some types of migration rather than others.

research into informal financial systems used by the poor - albeit often on highly unfavorable terms - revealed the incentives, terms and barriers to participation, such as transactions costs and collateral requirements.

Similarly, migration research needs to: include the types of migration the poor do undertake; better situate migration in the complex social-economic structures and family strategies, including children, through which the poor secure their livelihoods; and unpack why the poor do the types of migration they do, rather than others. Moreover a proper understanding of child migration is particularly sensitive to the right framework, because whilst aspects of children's migration can be framed like adult migration ('push-pull', labour, etc.), child migrants raise distinct issues. Children's biologically evolving human capacities, and cultural and legislative norms on 'maturity' and 'childhood', affect children's vulnerabilities and resiliencies in migration in distinctive ways – just like biological differences and social constructions raise gendered distinctions. And because childhood is a foundational life-stage affecting an individual's later achievements, child migration has long-run effects on migrant outcomes.

This paper discusses links between poverty and migration, and policy implications in five sections. First we discuss – very briefly – different theoretical approaches to the study of migration, and assess their relevance for understanding the migration of the poor specifically. We then review evidence on the migration-poverty link about which most is known, relating to income and consumption poverty. This literature is still evolving and has many controversies – but it has a long tradition, and has shown the main channels by which migration can, but does not always, reduce poverty.

The third and fourth sections elaborate on research gaps. Poverty is multi-dimensional, dynamic over time and different among household members. These generate three large unknowns in migration-poverty linkages. While the study of migration-poverty linkages is multi-disciplinary, most of it has focused on one dimension of poverty, its material dimension, in income, consumption, remittances, assets, and so on. Household dynamics, risks, and effects across generations have received some theoretical attention but empirical research in this area is weak. A particular generations issue raised in this paper relates to children – and on this count, perceptions that exist are often wrong, hardly useful and bedevilled by faulty assumptions, starting with the idea that children's well-being in the context of migration can be lumped together with adults' in a phenomenon almost always conceptualized as an adult enterprise.

Based on these finding, the fifth section discusses implications for aid policy and donor-driven processes like PRSPs. Challenges for policy makers at the national and regional levels include practical ways of integrating migrants into development processes, but also more entrenched issues related to the way social policy interacts with citizenship.

SECTION 1: MIGRATION THEORIES: DO THEY HELP TO UNDERSTAND MIGRATION BY THE POOR?

Early migration theories focused on poverty of places rather than people. This was symptomatic of thinking at the time which saw poverty reduction to be synonymous with national development and GDP growth. Development was posed as a problem of structural transformation of the rural backward sector into the urban modern sector (Lewis 1954). Probably the most important theoretical starting point for migration theories is built on this idea: the Harris-Todaro model (Todaro 1969, Harris and Todaro 1970). In this, a prospective migrant weighs the difference between the expected earnings from formal sector urban employment (possibly after an initial period of informal sector employment), and the expected earnings in the village. While the general validity of the model has been affirmed empirically,³ its two-sector characterization simplifies patterns of migration (it ignores rural-rural migration, and return to rural areas, for example, and as a result under-emphasizes migration by the poorest) and misses how labour markets connect to product or output markets.

More recent migration literature has emphasized family strategies as crucial elements in migration decisions (Stark 1991). The family is conceptualized as a coalition vis-à-vis the rest of the world, and family members share costs and rewards of migration. Migration is seen as a form of income and asset diversification by families, with families investing in migrants, migrants in families, and both expecting returns from that. Adolescent children are probably part of this, especially in poor communities where a long period of childhood is unaffordable, but the literature on family migration strategies generally makes no recognition of children (a point developed in later sections). Economic models using this line of theory have been of two types (de la Brière et al. 1997). One type focuses on implicit insurance contracts between the migrant and the household left behind to cope with household risk, and shows the role of remittances as a form of portfolio diversification. A second type builds on literature around bequest motives, and sees remittances as investments in household assets that the migrant will later inherit, supported by analyses of different remittance behaviours between men and women (caused by gender-differentiated inheritance rules).

Using households rather than places as the unit of analysis is appropriate for a number of reasons. First, it sits more comfortably with sociological and anthropological analysis. Second, it takes better account of the fact that much, if not most, migration is “circular”, with continued interactions with areas of origins rather than a one-way and one-off move. This takes the analysis out of the (implicit) emphasis on “transition” in the rural–urban models of Harris and Todaro. Third, a focus on households should, in principle, make it easier to incorporate findings from the dominant kind of poverty analysis, with its focus on households.

However, the “new economics of migration” remains grounded in a functionalistic and individualistic framework. Migration is seen primarily in terms of contractual arrangements within the household, and as solutions to market failures, such as the absence of access to insurance or investment in education. There is little attention to the “non-economic” factors that drive such decisions that help, for example, to

³ For example, Lucas’ (2002) theoretical model of rural-urban migration emphasizes increasing skill levels in urban areas, and widening gap with agricultural workers.

differentiate migration for women, men, girls and boys. A great amount of literature emphasizes the role of social and other institutions in migration, sometimes seen as being consistent with traditional values and other times as “unravelling the social fabric”. While the new economics emphasizes the role of family for analyzing migration-poverty linkages, it fails to sufficiently emphasize that these linkages are mediated by cultural factors, values, and so on.

Even in circumstances of poverty, migration responses are not simple responses driven by economic incentives, but informed by ideas of appropriate actions in a particular context.⁴ Research focusing on migrant networks has played a very important role in helping to see movements of people as part, not only of “traditions of migration” and interpreted in a “cumulative migration theory”, but also wider processes of social and economic development. Finally, gender analysis has contributed greatly, not only in understanding differentiated motivations for and impacts of migration, but also in the way migration processes are structured, emphasizing power and exploitation: gender is an essential tool for unpicking the migration process (Chant and Redcliffe 1992; Wright 1995).

Marxist perspectives offer a long-tradition of analysing links between migration on the one hand, and poverty and development on the other, mostly in terms of post-colonialism, apartheid, and uneven capitalist development. Partly in the context of urbanization and debates on the informal sector, but also with its focus on migrant workers within rural areas, this tradition explicitly challenged the individualistic assumptions underlying models like Todaro’s, and have described migration as an inalienable part of transition toward or development of capitalism.⁵ With respect to international migration too, this tradition has emphasized the exploitation of migrant workers, as beneficial to capital and richer nations, at the cost of labour and poorer nations and regions. Moreover, similar to neoclassical approaches to migration, Marxist models focus exclusively on economic factors. Migration processes can be understood adequately only as the outcome of interaction of a diversity of factors, including social-cultural and economic forces, and gendered and childhood norms and rules – and how migration in turn alters these factors.

An important theme cutting across the different analytical traditions is why people participate in migration – still a relatively rare event at the population level – and this has led to theorization of migration as a selective process. The rational choice framework in labour migration theories suggests individuals with better education, skills and labour market experience are more likely to migrate because of their greater ability to capture its rewards.⁶ The poorest are assumed to be selected out of migration because they cannot afford it, and because, their lower human capital implies lower expected rewards. The “new economics of migration” suggests the poorest do not have access to migration opportunities because of their lower capacity for risk-taking, and literature on kinship networks in migration suggests the poorest lack social capital

⁴ Findley (1997) describes family-migration interactions in the context of African family structures and de Haan (2005) discusses some of these issues focusing on South Asia. See also Whitehead et al. (2007).

⁵ Safa 1982; Chapman and Prothero 1985; de Haan 2006

⁶ See the review by Waddington and Sabates-Wheeler (2003). See Lipton (1980) on the basis of villages studies in India argued that the better-off *and* the poorest migrate, but for very different kinds of opportunities, hence contributing to increasing inequality.

that facilitates migration. Although the evidence is limited and mixed (Waddington and Sabates-Wheeler 2003), there appears to be acceptance of an “empirical regularity” that the poorest and richest have lower migration propensities. The severely poor are believed to be almost unable to migrate, or migrate under such bad terms – for example, in bonded labour – that migration does not improve their well-being or makes them worse off (Mosse et al. 2002).

While international migration to the global North captures most of the policy attention, migration within countries, and to countries in the South probably are more relevant for poverty reduction, and are likely to involve much larger numbers of children. First, middle-income countries attract migrants from nearby low-income countries (Hujo and Piper 2007). Migration costs to developing country destinations are lower and therefore more widely affordable. Cross-border migration in zones with particularly porous borders and historical-cultural similarities, such as Nepal–Bangladesh-India, or across much of West Africa, may present even lower barriers for poorer people. Second, the scale of internal migration is many multiples of international migration, and participation in it is probably more widespread throughout the income distribution. For example, remittances from internal migration is estimated to be around \$30-40 billion in China alone, compared to international remittances of around \$200 billion worldwide (DfID 2007). In China, while remittances and investments of Chinese abroad have greatly contributed to its economic development, the internal migration of perhaps 200 million people has been one of the key factors in its impressive record of poverty reduction.

Internal migration consists of many different types. In Thailand, a third of internal migration was multiple or seasonal (rather than a single move), and at least until 1990, migration *into* rural areas was twice as large as into urban areas (Guest 2003) – and while this has changed probably by now in Thailand, the point is indicative of countries at earlier stages of their structural transformation. In India, with high rates of economic growth, migration within rural areas remains a significant – if not the largest – component of total migration flows. These kinds of migration may be more affordable, given that “single-move migration” is costlier because it involves more of the family. It may also be better suited to the human capital profiles of poor farming households.

International migration studies and internal migration studies tend to be divorced fields of enquiry involving different researchers and concerns (DeWind and Holdaway 2008, 2005), and this may make it harder to capture the poorest migrants in research. The same disconnect, though to a lesser extent, can be noted for research on migration into Northern countries versus South-South migration; and also cleavages between research on rural-urban migration, and that which focuses on diverse patterns of internal migration. This is not to deny that very different issues are raised by the different fields of enquiry; however, from the view of a poor household, these may simply be alternative forms of movement. Which type of migration a poor household undertakes depends on household strategies and opportunities, which themselves are partly conditional on the situation of poverty. Skeldon (2003:12) argues that “those

looking at internal migration and those looking at international migration are separately looking at what are likely to be different responses to similar forces”.⁷

To conclude, theoretical diversity and the structuring of fields of study, may to a great extent explain the persistence of diverging views on how migration links to poverty, between those who see migration as a key poverty reduction strategy, and those who argue no clear empirical links can be established (de Haan 2006). The different intellectual traditions also have strongly influenced ideologies and perceptions around migration policy. The theoretical diversity has shaped empirical research, and the following section discusses what it is we do know about linkages between migration and poverty.

SECTION 2: MIGRATION AND POVERTY: EVIDENCE OF LINKAGES

This section reviews empirical studies on linkages between migration and poverty. This is more complex than may be assumed at first, even if we confine ourselves to a narrow definition of poverty, as we do in this section. There is increasing evidence on key questions around the extent and nature of selectivity in migration, remittances and impact on inequality. However, a general difficulty – as applicable to the theory section – is that relatively little of the evidence is sufficiently poor-specific, in order to recognise that the particular contexts of poor people’s lives may generate different processes, constraints and opportunities.

Who migrates?

Part of the answer to the question of migration and poverty obviously depends on who migrates. Labour migration is usually by young able-bodied people. While they are often men, the gendered nature of labour markets (both demand and supply) is context- and sector specific, and changing over time. For example, the expansion of service sectors may lead to larger numbers of female migrants, export-industries may have a preference for (young) women, and cultural factors may influence the propensity of women to migrate.⁸

Migrants are often not from the poorest regions, as remoteness may make migration more difficult, and usually not from the poorest households, because the cost of migration may be too high.⁹ Evidence on land-ownership as a determinant of migration typically varies strongly, and can change over time. Much research has shown that migrants tend to be slightly better educated or skilled (see de Haan 1999), but obviously much depends on the types of jobs that are available, and such patterns

⁷ Historical experience over the past century suggests that the participation of poorer – and previously excluded groups – in migration is dynamically evolving, subject to factors such as national income growth and economic restructuring through internal migration (Williamson 2006).

⁸ A classic example of the latter is Andrea Menefee Singh’s article in the 1984 volume *Women in the Cities of Asia*, showing gendered differences in labour migration in northern and southern parts of India; quoted in de Haan (2005).

⁹ For example, research in Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh concludes that the poorest rarely migrate, possibly because of availability of labour in the household, and the resources required for undertaking the move (Deshingkar and Start 2003).

also change over time.¹⁰ Comparisons of incomes of migrants and non-migrants in areas of destination show that the former are often not far behind the average — but equally important is the finding that the diversity of migrants' income[?] is at least as large as among the non-migrant population (de Haan and Dubey 2002).

While there is evidence that the poorest, least skilled, least physically capable and without networks tend to migrate less, it is also true that the types of migration the poorest engage in is less likely to be captured in surveys and census. Under-reporting may apply in places such as Vietnam and China where formal registration of residence influences survey-coverage, but also for example, in India where rural–rural migration is under-recorded (Rogaly et al. 2002).

The poorest migrate often as an extreme survival strategy, suggesting that when they migrate, this is likely to be less beneficial than the migration by the better off. Evidence exists that migration by the poorest may reinforce exploitative structures like debt-bondage relationships (Mosse et al. 2002). People from the poorest areas often do not have access to the most rewarding opportunities, in urban areas or abroad, though they may migrate to activities nearby, for seasonal agricultural and less rewarding work. Also, survival strategies may mean that migration from the poorest households will include younger, more vulnerable family members – again, this migration is least likely to be picked up by surveys.

An important general finding is around the importance of migration networks, internationally as well as locally. Put simply, migrants move to places where friend, family members, neighbours or others from their village have moved before. As a result, migrants in a specific destination tend to come from specific areas of origin — particularly when the migratory jobs are relatively attractive and have higher returns. People who are better off may pave the way for migrants with fewer resources. Migration patterns are structured by social divides, such as caste in India, religion, or ethnicity in Vietnam. A neglected area for investigation is how migration networks may increase or decrease children's migration. Children's migration may depend on networks of adult migrants – as well as child migrants – for information, resources, travel and contacts to facilitate the migration decision and process. For example, de Haas (2007) documents how sustained migration from Morocco has meant that for many young people the question is not whether to migrate, but when and how.

Different migrants, thus, have different motives, reflecting different opportunities. At one end of the extreme, skilled international migrants tend to have clear views of bettering their and their families' positions, while rural-to-rural migration tend to have survival strategies – often in the context of seasonal opportunities – as a main motive. Savings for dowries is an important motive for female migrants in western Africa, and in other cases too migration may be linked to a particular period in the life cycle. Thus, there are important variations, and the characteristics depend on economic, political as well as cultural circumstances—changing over time, partly under the influence of migration itself.

¹⁰ For example, an historical study by the late Arvind Das (1985) described how migration from a village in Bihar started with the sons of landowners, for clerical occupations, which set the scene for migration by the servants of landowners and other villagers.

Remittances

The question of remittances is of course central in much of the thinking on impact of migration, and it has now become one of the new development mantras, in the words of Kapur (2004). Economic theories tend to have rather different interpretations of remittances, and data are difficult to interpret. What do we know about remittances, in different contexts?

Levels of remittances vary widely, depending on various factors such as accessibility of the home village, employment opportunities, costs of living, ease of remitting, and the “orientation” of the migrant. Reardon’s (1997) overview of the importance of the rural non-farm income in 25 case studies in Africa gives an idea of magnitude, and how this differs across locations. This showed that on average 45 per cent of total rural income was non-farm, varying between 22 and 93 per cent. In areas not close to major cities, migration earnings constituted 20 per cent of total non-farm earnings, whereas it was as high as 75 per cent in areas close to major cities. Ellis and Freeman’s (2004) livelihood study in Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and Malawi showed that in Tanzania about half of household income is derived from agriculture (less so for the better off) and of the other half 36 per cent was non-farm income, 11 per cent was wages, and a mere four per cent was transfers (slightly higher for lower income groups). So roughly, across Africa about a quarter of total rural incomes may be derived from migration, but with wide variations, greatly depending on locations, and with different importance for different socioeconomic groups.

Evaluation of the impact of remittances has shifted since the 1970s, when there was much stress on the “conspicuous consumption” of migrants and their relatives, toward more positive views, focusing, for example, upon the conditions needed to secure the investment of remittances, and at least internationally, the emphasis in reducing transactions costs of sending remittances and how the scale of remittances far exceeds official aid. Literature that emphasizes productive investments include Papademetriou and Martin (1991) and various publications by Adams (1991, 1996, 1998). Durand et al. (1996a, 1996b) show income from migration stimulates economic activity, both directly and indirectly, and that it leads to significantly higher levels of employment, investment, and income. Finally, it needs pointing out that even very small amounts of remittances can be vital for poor people, including their food security.

Assessments of the way remittances are used also shows diversity, and can be modelled in different ways. There is no doubt that remittances can have negative and positive consequences—evidence suggests that the way remittances are used depends on the form of migration, the characteristics of the migrants and those who stay behind, and conditions for use of remittances and returning migrants. This points to one of the complexities of understanding the impact of migration: the conditions that make remittances be helpful for development or poverty reduction are generally the same conditions that made migrants leave in the first place. Assessments of impact need to be sensitive to the complexity in which this is embedded. First, they need to take account of the fact that this counts only successful migration, and there is a possibility that many migrants have not remitted despite having invested heavily. Second, data on remittances need to take account of reverse flows, of initial investment, but also for example of transfers of food from villages of origin to cities. Third, from a home country public policy perspective remittances need to be off-set

against the (public) investment in education and other forms of publicly funded investments.

Do migration and remittances reduce inequality?

As emphasized by Pritchett (pers. comm.), migration has to have an impact on inequality between sending and receiving areas, and ought to reduce overall income inequality. However, assessments of this, too are very varied, and are very dependent on unit and indicator of analysis (Black 2004). For example, the multi-donor research programme “Operationalizing Pro-Poor Growth” highlighted a key dilemma in assessing migration: while it generally helps to reduce poverty and increase income of the poor, migration and remittances also can lead to increased inequality within countries. A similar theme was highlighted in Indian Village Studies project in the 1970s, which showed that rural–urban migration did not tend to equalize incomes, between or within regions (Lipton 1982). Islam’s (1991) analysis of effects of migration to the Gulf from villages in Chittagong in Bangladesh shows some of possible negative effects: land became concentrated in the hand of migrant families, who turned into non-farmers, which contributed to a decrease in production. Land prices went up, and so did the cost of labour, though not so high as to lead to labour saving in agriculture.

But here too, generalizations appear meaningless. Of course, labour market opportunities are key drivers of these dynamics: where large numbers of opportunities for unskilled labour exist, as in China and Vietnam, migration is of course more likely to reduce poverty, and less likely to increase inequality within villages of origin. Some forms of migration lead to equalizing income within regions, though not necessarily between sending and receiving regions. In some cases migration increases income inequality, in some cases lowers it, and this relationship may change over time. The unit of analysis matters, too, as increased male income does not necessarily translate into increased well-being of women or children. While in some cases migration and remittances have led to development, in other cases it has not. A key issue appears to be not migration itself but the condition under which people leave and conditions for development generally which determine the impact of migration.

Impacts of migration

Given this diversity of migration patterns and motives, it should be expected that the impacts of migration are diverse too. In the first place, expectations that rural development will decrease out-migration may be unjustified (though it is likely to change the conditions of migration and composition of migrants); “poverty reduction is not in itself a migration-reducing strategy” (Sorensen et al. 2002). For example, in the Punjab, the Green Revolution occurred simultaneously with both high rates of out-migration as well as in-migration from poorer Indian states. In China the development of rural enterprises appeared to increase rates of out-migration, except among the more educated peasants (Liang and White 1997) – this happened at a time of a rapidly expanding economy. According to Skeldon (1997), it is impossible to envisage development without migration, and migration is development. For example, as Skeldon notes, emigration was increasing while Japan was urbanizing. Similarly, migration patterns in the Indian Punjab are closely related to the development path of the Punjab, with large outflow of people from rural areas, continued links and

investment by people overseas, changes in agricultural production within the state, and accompanying inflow of relatively poor migrants from other states in India.

With respect to international migration and receiving countries, evidence exists that immigration has improved economic welfare, including raising tax revenue (Sriskandarajah et al. 2005)—given restrictive immigration policies this is unsurprising as receiving countries allow mainly people with skills for which there is an excess demand in the labour market. Most research, at aggregate levels, seems to contradict the popular belief that immigration contributes to unemployment, or substantial decreases in wages in host societies, though there is of course micro-evidence that employers can attract migrants to reduce wages and bargaining powers of local workers, as Breman (1985) has extensively documented for western India.

Much less clarity exists about the effect of migration on development of areas of origin, including in agriculture, even though this is perhaps the most relevant question for development studies and policies. Very few studies trace the effects of migration and remittances on villages of origin, even in areas with long traditions of out-migration – migration studies tend to focus on the top of the “migration hump”. There is evidence that migrants contribute to building of schools or other community activities (Russell et al. 1990). Migration can help to alleviate unemployment (Ghosh 1992). At the same time, out-migration can lead to a shortage of labour in some contexts, perhaps particularly the more skilled and, almost inevitably, entrepreneurial parts of the population. Field studies by Croll and Ping in villages of migrant origin in Jiangsu, Anhui, Sichuan, and Gansu provinces in China, where out-migration was caused by land scarcity and rising costs of agriculture, showed a shortage of labour caused by migration. Remittances benefited families, but did not contribute to village development or the establishment and maintenance of village services including those for facilitating agricultural development (Croll and Ping 1997).¹¹

Not much is known, it seems, about the role of migrants in enhancing efficiency in agriculture. In England in the eighteenth century, and possible elsewhere in Europe, migrants appear to have played important innovatory roles (Thirsk 1991). Lakshmanasamy’s (1990) literature review concludes that migration and remittances modernize the rural sector, both directly and indirectly, through their impact on the production-increasing technological and institutional changes in the agricultural sector. Nevertheless, the positive impacts depend on many factors like seasonality of movement, educational levels, length of time spent away, assets, and social structures and institutions allowing women and others to pursue activities previously reserved for men and household heads.

For decades, there has been a particular concern about “brain drain” (usually international migration by the better skilled, but equally important within countries). Recent analysis has started to look at the complexity of the issues involved, but has generally taken a more positive stance vis-à-vis the brain drain question (Kapur 2004; Pritchett 2003). However, relevant for the direct impact on poverty, international migration has become increasingly selective, which implies that there may be fewer

¹¹ The World Bank Poverty Assessment for El Salvador highlights that remittances are important for raising household incomes (and stimulating demand for goods). But in assessing impact, the counterfactual is important too: families might have increased their labour supply in local markets if migration opportunities and remittances did not exist (see de Haan 2005a).

opportunities for poorer people to benefit than in the 19th century. Detrimental effects of the selectivity of migration include increased international inequality, particularly if migrants are disconnected from those left behind. Beneficial effects include remittances, return migration, creation of trade and business networks, and incentive effects on human capital formation at home. Cross-country analysis indicates limited evidence that return migration is significant among high skilled (Docquier and Rapoport 2004), or that they contribute to technology diffusion. Docquier and Rapoport (2004) find positive benefits of prospect of migration on human capital formation and GDP growth—leading to a conclusion that “brain drain should not induce developing countries to reduce education expenditures”. But they find effects are different for different countries.

Analyses of migration tend to focus on the ascent and top of the “migration hump”. Impacts, however, can be long-term, and fortunes can reverse. One important example of this is the likelihood that migration opportunities decline. On the one hand, areas of origin function as a safety valve, as seen in Indonesia during 1997 and many transition countries. Other assessments, for example on the effect of changing South African policies on migrant communities in Lesotho, Malawi, and Swaziland are less positive. Chirwa (1997:650) gives a generally optimistic view about the effects of oscillating labour migration in the region, and describes the reasons for success and failure in the use of returns from migration: the “social, economic, as well as political disruptions caused by this process are just too great for the weak economies and fragile political structures of the labour-supplying countries and local communities to effectively handle”. Leliveld (1997) describes the effects of declining migration on households in rural Swaziland: employment possibilities in Swaziland are limited, and relatively young households, with few working members, and a weak economic position are among the most vulnerable in this context. Also, literature shows the negative effects of sudden barriers to international migration, such as the impact on sending countries of the Gulf War (for example Addleton 1991).

Deshingkar (2004) mentions a whole range of issues that need to be taken up to better understand, and indeed enhance the impacts of migration on development: for example, better capture of migration in surveys and census, integrate an understanding of migration in national planning, identify conditions under which migration and remittances can contribute to development, review laws and regulation, promote training, and identify conditions under which population mobility should be encouraged. China, whose reforms benefited greatly from its overseas Chinese in areas nearby, recently has started to promote return of migrants, including those that had started to move further away during the 1980s, for study or work. In India, recent pilot programmes have begun to provide identity cards for migrants, primary education projects with facilities for children of migrants, and NGO-support to internal migrants. The question though remains whether such initiatives illustrate a more positive view of migrants and a better understanding of the importance of migration.

Our review so far of theories about and evidence of migration and its links to development and poverty suggest that we do know a fair bit, but that much remains uncertain. This is partly due to the relative neglect of migration in mainstream development thinking and policy, but also because of treatment of migrants as a homogeneous category. The impact of migration is heavily dependent on contexts, of

the demand as well as supply side of the (migration) labour market, and the specific characteristics of migrants.

SECTION 3: CHILDREN AS (INDEPENDENT) MIGRANTS

Childhood as an intrahousehold cleavage has been largely ignored in migration studies, with intrahousehold issues being framed mainly in terms of gender. Our intention is not to pose gender against childhood – neither is sufficiently mainstreamed – but child migrants are particularly overlooked. When children are considered, it is usually as extra categories in age-breakdowns, or lumped together with young adults as “youth”, or as attachments to adult migration. This fails to capture that childhood is a biologically distinct and socially constructed experience – parallel to gender distinctions. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified almost universally, recognises the distinctiveness of childhood and accords under 18 year olds claims on societies and governments to promote and protect their development, and the rights are borderless and portable.¹²

The literature that exists largely concerns children accompanying migrant parents or being left behind by migrating parents (Yaquab 2007). Both these themes deserve greater attention, particularly from mainstream migration research perspectives (rather than viewing them as specialist issues), to understand for example, how children affect adult migration through their roles in family ties and household economics. A third category of children who are especially misunderstood is the large numbers of migrant children – mostly adolescents – who are moving independently of parents and adult-guardians.

Children migrating independently are often assumed to be trafficked or abducted.¹³ Rarely recognised as migrants, they include rural children on urban streets; children working in (other) rural areas in plantations and agriculture; children fending for themselves after migrating with an adult who was deported, died, or abandoned them; migrant children invisible in domestic service, restaurants, petty trade, and workshops; and children crossing borders independently, mainly without documents, and mainly to other developing countries. Some are in school, but few can avoid work entirely. In addition, presumably children can benefit and succeed as migrants (and indeed many adults migrated as children), although hardly any research exists on the “positives”. There is a mosaic of highly varied children’s contexts, some at large scale, in which migration is the common denominator.

Basic questions, such as scale, age- or sex-structure of children’s migration, remain unknown. Much of it makes no distinction between children migrating with families, and children migrating independently. World Bank (2007) reports large shares of 12-

¹² Article 2, CRC: “States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child’s or his or her parent’s or legal guardian’s race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.”

¹³ The *United Nations Protocol to Prevent Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Person, Especially Women and Children*, adopted in 2000 and also known as the ‘Palermo Protocol’ defines trafficking in children (under 18 years old) as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation, even if this does not involve any fraudulent means such as violence, deception or coercion.

24 year olds in international migration (ranging from 19-50 per cent of migrant flows, and 6-47 per cent of migrant stocks). Barros et al. (2002) estimated that around half the irregular migrants in Morocco from sub-Saharan Africa were 15-25 year olds. ILO (2004) reports 60 per cent of children working in the informal sector in Ugandan cities were migrants. In sending communities in Laos one-third of migration was by children, and Thai immigration police in border provinces placed it closer to half (Phetsiriseng 2003). A study in South Africa concluded: "What was clear from the research is that there are sufficiently large numbers of children crossing borders unaccompanied to warrant major concern. Researchers were able to interview at least 60 children ...within a two week period... and they could have continued." (SCF 2007).

Research on children's independent migration in developing countries is highly limited in geographical coverage and analytical scope. No in-depth country study exists (developing or otherwise) that connects children's migration with its broader causes or impact. What exist are mostly ethnographic studies, scattered across a few countries, all with small samples. While the literature serves to illustrate some of the social-economic complexity of children's independent migration, there still needs to be a more explicit focus on the role of poverty, and the impact of migration on children's well-being.

One emerging issue relates to children's agency, with some studies noting that children help motivate their own migration. A study in rural Burkina Faso found that the majority of adolescent migration seemed self-motivated, and in half the cases adolescents financed the transport (TdH 2003). Phetsiriseng (2003) reports similarly for Laos, and Iversen (2006:11) writes on India: "The evidence from Mandya suggests that boys 12-14 regularly made labour migration decisions independently of their parents, and often without consent or even informing parents about their departure." A study of 4500 cocoa farms in Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Nigeria, found that around one per cent of farmers employed cross-border or domestic migrant children (IITA 2002). An intermediary was involved in recruiting 30-40 per cent of the child workers, but the bulk of recruitment was by other workers, children making contacts themselves or by the farmer directly. In the cases of recruitment by intermediaries, none of the children reported their parents being paid and none reported being forced against their will to leave home, and most claimed to know the recruiter.

This issue is connected to a strong theorization of childhood as a "safe life-stage" as dependents of adults. Childhood is supposed to properly consist of school, play and not work – and, definitely not migration away from the family. The study in Burkina Faso (TdH 2003) asked adults about this and found varied responses – from those defining childhood as under 10 years of age (based on ideas about capacity for self-reflection), under 15 years of age (about decision-making), or older adolescence (person unmarried). Around 40 per cent of adults felt 10-14 year olds should do the same tasks as adults. Migrant children in Ghana and the Gambia cite "...strong expectations in family systems that children should start "giving back" to their parents as soon as they are able, usually by their early teens" (Chant and Jones 2005:191).

Although economic factors may act as backdrop, the actual motives for why children migrate independently can be more complex. Camacho (1999) reports reasons for migration given by independent migrant children in domestic work in Manila – and

among some predictable reasons, such as family poverty and consumer items, a high percentage (30 per cent) said that paying for education was their motive. Similar arguments are in Giani (2006) for Bangladesh, Hashim (2006) for Ghana, and Anarfi et al. (2005) in other countries. Among 10-18 year old independent migrants from rural Mali, Castle and Diarra (2003) found that while economic reasons were cited, the motives were socially and culturally embedded, taking on characteristics of “rites of passage”. Girls migrated to have money to buy articles for their marriage, while boys wanted to buy articles to increase their status. Many cited positive experiences of migration, being well treated by their employers, meeting their migratory objectives, improving their linguistic abilities, and particularly in contexts without schooling, the means to experience different worlds.

In some cases, children’s independent migration is in response to health and other shocks. Ansell and Blerk (2004) found that in communities with high rates of HIV, children migrated for work, to provide care for sick relatives, and sometimes experienced multiple moves. Orphanhood is a marker of several different kinds of risks, including especially schooling, labour and consumption.¹⁴ As mentioned before, the role of migration to diversify incomes and address household risks is well-recognised, and children’s independent migration may be part of this. Akresh (2004) connects income shocks to child fostering in West Africa, where some three-quarters of fostered children have both parents surviving, and another tenth have one parent.

Stites et al. (2007) found that in Uganda domestic abuse, hunger and abandonment by families were reasons for why children migrated, and why they were living and working on the streets. Some abandoned children kept the belief that family members would return to collect them, in some cases even after two years. Sometimes adults orchestrated the actual movement to the destination, before abandoning the children or before the children left the family. Conticini and Hulme (2006) found that in Bangladesh domestic abuse was a factor for children’s independent migration. This relates to issues of children’s agency discussed above. Many of the risks that migrant children face are better understood in the context of social reactions and harmful legal structures when children act autonomously in their own interest.

SECTION 4: MIGRATION, INTERGENERATIONAL POVERTY AND THE LIFECOURSE

Another aspect of the biological and social distinctiveness of children’s migration is that childhood is a foundational life-stage in terms of cognition, physical vitality and personality. Although this is recognised in poverty literature in terms of how childhood poverty may cause adulthood poverty, it has not been incorporated into literature connecting migration to poverty (Yaqub 2007b). Most research looks at the contemporaneous impact of migration on poverty, and neglects that migration has lifecourse and longitudinal impacts. It therefore makes no connection to the large literature on the social and economic determinants of the intergenerational persistence of poverty (Yaqub 2004, 2008). Cognition, physical vitality and personality are significant factors in human capital models commonly used to explain incomes, household formation, social inclusion and other indicators of adult achievement.

¹⁴ Guarcello et al. 2004; Gillespie 2006; O’Kane et al. 2006

The issue needs to be more refined than childhood versus adulthood (Yaqub 2002). There are periods within childhood when certain human capacities or “functionings” are more sensitive to development (Bornstein 1989). Language acquisition is strongly age-dependent (and important for migrant labour market success), as is the body’s physical dimensions (important for labour capacity). Advances in neurology have revealed how nutrition at certain ages affects cognitive and psychological abilities (Scrimshaw 1998). Birthweight is negatively correlated with adult attainments in cognition, earnings and employment (Bartley et al. 1994; Ivanovic et al. 2000). Sensitivity interacts with two other effects: resilience to harm and reversibility of damage, both of which vary with age too. For example, resilience to lifetime illness may be influenced by immunocompetence developed at foetal and infant ages (Prentice 1998); or iron supplementation can help reverse learning and memory deficits in over 5 year olds, but not if the iron-shortfall occurred in infancy when iron assists in permanent structural changes in the body.¹⁵

Migration could alter these dynamic processes, such as by changing the level of resources and care available to the child, shifting intrahousehold allocations of resources and care across ages and sexes (for example by altering household structures), and opening new socioeconomic opportunities and risks. These will partly depend on the characteristics of migration because children migrate under highly varied circumstances (some favourable and others harmful). But also, the impact may depend on whether the timing of migration coincides with aforementioned age-effects in terms of developmental sensitivity, resilience to harm and reversibility of damage. Of course, lifecourse dynamics in human capacities exist also in old age, although the issue is motivated here by looking at childhood.

Research on age-effects in child development is far from complete, and so it is difficult to be more exact about the interactions with migration. Whilst ‘growing-up’ represents an overall huge expansion of human capacities that migration clearly could affect, the development of different dimensions of human capacities occur at different rates and at different points in childhood, under processes yet to be fully detailed. One analytical approach is to connect age-at-migration to various outcomes (although causality and potential interventions become less clear). Several studies show that children migrating at older ages ultimately achieve less education (origin education plus destination education). For example, migrants arriving in the USA aged 15-18 years achieve three years less education than those arriving before age 4 years (Chiswick and DebBurman 2003; Gonzalez 2003). In Canada the difference is roughly 1.6 years (Schaafsma and Sweetman 2001). Educational attainments of migrants arriving before age 4 years resemble that of second-generation migrants. The strongest adverse effect of being “older-at-migration” appears after age ten or 11, which coincides with the end of the sensitive period for language acquisition (Bleakley 2003). For possibly similar reasons, in Sweden, children migrating at older ages catch-up maths more easily than other subjects (Bohlmark 2005).

Extra education at the destination, by migrating early, translates into increased earnings as adults (controlling for other characteristics). In Canada the earnings of a migrant arriving after age 45 years is 32 per cent less than a migrant arriving before age 4 years (Schaafsma and Sweetman 2001). Migrants speaking an official Canadian

¹⁵ Pollitt and Mueller 1982; Rao and Georgieff 2000. For a full review, see Yaqub (2002).

language have 11-13 per cent higher earnings, but this gain is less for migrants arriving after age 18 years suggesting the importance of “native language acquisition” (Chiswick and Miller 2003). Australian data shows that earnings growth after entering work is higher for migrants arriving before age 15 years, rather than at older ages (Wilkins 2003). In the USA second-generation migrants and migrants arriving before age 12 years have similar earnings profiles, and have substantial earnings advantages over older arrivals (equivalent to half the earnings advantage of a university degree, or 10 years of work experience) (Allensworth 1997).

Variations in the effect of age-at-migration exist across time periods, ethnic groups and destinations, thus highlighting that contextual factors alter the impact of migration on child development. For example, Mexicans in the USA show the strongest decline in education with age-at-migration, and this may reflect their distinctive migration pattern with greater circular migration, and a high propensity for teenagers to leave school in Mexico to work in the USA (McKenzie and Rapoport 2006). Second-generation Turkish migrants have varied outcomes across European destinations, with better schooling in France, Belgium and the Netherlands as compared to Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Undocumented children who are repatriated at sensitive development ages, and who might also re-migrate, might be especially vulnerable.

Age-at-migration has not been studied for migrants in developing countries. Similar processes could be hypothesized. Children migrating at older ages might gain less total education (rural plus urban) than those arriving at earlier ages, and may enter work sooner. Their rural education may earn lower returns than urban education, and they may face language and social barriers. On the other hand, rural schooling may be so bad that children might benefit from migration, if they can access urban schools (Giani 2006).

Brockerhoff (1994) found that across 17 developing countries the chances of infant mortality increased sharply among infants accompanying their migrant mothers to urban areas or being left behind in rural areas, to levels well above the mortality of non-migrant infants (at rural origin or urban destination). However infants born after migrants settled in urban areas had better survival chances than rural non-migrants. This raises the possibility that any benefits of migration at young ages might be outweighed by additional risks, but being born at destination in the second-generation might be advantageous.

SECTION 5: MIGRATION, POVERTY AND SOCIAL POLICY

The paper has discussed the hugely different perspectives on migration in development thinking. This partly reflects different conditions under which migration occurs, but partly also underlying assumptions of desirability of migration, and different perceptions of the rights of migrants, as citizens. This section looks at the implications of what we know about migration and poverty for broader development debates, in particular as they are articulated in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, and the recent social policy discourse (UNRISD 2006).

Even a decade ago, migration received scant attention in the broader development literature (de Haan 1999; de Haan and Rogaly 2002). This has changed considerably,

with recent years seeing several high-level intergovernmental discussions on international migration and development.¹⁶ China, for example, has moved from restricting population movement toward facilitating labour mobility, and starting to address unintended consequences that accompany the movements of 100-200 million people. But even now, there remains a sedentary bias in development perceptions, with policy documents frequently ignoring migration, or defining it as a problem. And where migration does enter public or academic debates, simplified images of migration often predominate, ignoring complex gendered and age patterns, and ignoring agencies of men, women, and children.¹⁷ And importantly, internal migration continues to get little attention, even though this is quantitatively more important, especially for poorer groups who seldom manage to move abroad.

An important arena for development debate since the late 1990s has been the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, the instrument developed by the World Bank and IMF, which implied debt relief to heavily-indebted poor countries and an increased focus on poverty reduction. As PRSPs were envisaged as “comprehensive” development strategies, it was probably inevitable that many reviews were commissioned to consider whether particular elements of development were sufficiently incorporated. A review by Black (2004) on how PRSPs dealt with migration found limited reference and content:

At present, PRSPs show considerable ambivalence toward migration, with the subject either not mentioned at all, or seen as contributing to population growth, urban squalor, the breakdown of traditional family structures, crime, diseases such as HIV/AIDS, land degradation and/or rural poverty.”

The review showed that seven PRSPs in Africa did not mention migration at all, and in ten other countries the associated anti-poverty strategies did not refer to migration, and in some cases policy responses aimed to reduce migration. Most strikingly from a poverty-reduction point of view, but reflecting a long tradition of sedentary bias and fears of uncontrolled masses flooding cities, migration is usually seen as negative. Only a few documents refer to benefits of migration, such as boosting incomes among the poor, or mention the negative impact of restrictive measures, such as on remittances. Exceptions include PRSPs for the Cape Verde, Senegal and Mauritania, which suggest strategies to promote remittances, engage emigrants in national development, or to shift toward urban jobs promotion rather than reducing rural-urban migration.

China shows many of the features of what a more positive view on migration looks like. As mentioned, it is clear international migrants have played an enormous role (Zhu 2006). The Chinese government has had a clear strategy to maintain close links with its diaspora in the (South East Asia) region, and is currently attracting the return of Chinese abroad, including students, as an integral part of its development strategy. With respect to national migration, China’s experience of moving away from the old dualistic and controlled migration to much freer flows is of great importance. Again, it

¹⁶ See www.migrationdevelopment.org/index.php?id=8.

¹⁷ Recent attention to ‘environmental refugees’ as a result of climate change is an example, as analyzed and criticized effectively in a recent paper commissioned by the social development department in the World Bank (Raleigh et al. 2008).

is key to have a good understanding on the policies that have accompanied this: the gradual reform of the *hukou* (household registration) system and local experimentation with alternatives, programmes of training including with international support, programmes of resettlement that have been regarded as poverty reducing and successful, and a strong emphasis in thinking that development is accompanied by population mobility.¹⁸

But such positive or supportive approaches remain the exception rather than the rule. Even in recent social policy literature, which promotes pro-active social policies after years of seeing it as something residual within neo-liberalism and structural adjustment,¹⁹ and which emphasises links between economic and social policies,²⁰ few references are made to migration, arguably reflecting the ambiguous position of migration in policy perceptions.²¹

Clearly social policy on migration should be both protective and supportive. But at best, current thinking is focused on the protective issues, mainly in terms of social policies that compensate for the failures of markets (in terms of safety nets), as distinct from how social policies enable migrants to contribute to development. Of course, as we know from the international migration literature, social policies are often a core mechanism of exclusion, and migrants are often depicted as abusers of social systems. In areas of destinations, migrants are often excluded from access to many provisions, and people on the move tend to struggle with carrying over previously accumulated benefits. Non-governmental organizations – families, churches, migrant organizations, private sector – often make up for the failure of state policies (Hall 2005).

An important aspect of this is children denied access to social services because their parents are irregular migrants. Research in the USA suggests that having one irregular migrant parent increases the chances of a child living in poverty by 3 times, and having two irregular migrant parents increases it by 7 times (Kanaiaupuni 2000). The Council of Europe has noted the marked variation across governments in the treatment of migrant children in accessing even very basic services in health and education (Council of Europe 2003). A study in South Africa found that 70 per cent of Somali refugee children were not registered in school (GCIM 2005). Without doubt, similar disadvantages exist for children of migrants within national borders, where access to services in places of destination is limited.

The link between social policy and migration goes deeper than those important areas of exclusion alone. Social policy plays a key part on defining citizenship (Mamdani 2005): not only can citizenship (or “permanent residency”) define access to social services, social policy in turn also defines citizenship, and the gender and age components of that citizenship: delivery of social services almost per definition defines eligibility in terms of nationality or residency – even within national borders.

¹⁸ Cai Fang 2007; Holdaway 2007. Inevitably, many policy issues remain, for example the impact on migration on children left behind, as discussed in Jingzhong et al. for Mid-West China.

¹⁹ Mkandawire 2004; UNRISD 2006; de Haan 2007

²⁰ Kanbur 2007), Wood and Gough (2006) draw lessons from OECD social policy literature.

²¹ However, migration and livelihoods was a theme of a session of the 2005 social policy conference in Arusha: Hall (2005) on international migrants from Ecuador, Yeates (2005) on the “global care chain” formed by international migrants, and Azam (2005) on policies in Pakistan and the Philippines.

Education, health, social security, affirmative action – all these policies are deeply political projects, with implications for principles of solidarity, and who can contest the content and quality of state provisions and who cannot.²²

The political nature of social policy is evident in terms of cross-border migrants, but is no less important internally. As mentioned, migration within China is restricted through the registration system, effectively making rural migrants second class citizens in urban areas – even though their economic contribution is increasingly recognised, restrictions are gradually removed, and local governments are starting to enable migrants’ access to services. Cross-state-border migrants in India can effectively be foreigners in their own country, and the federal character of the Nigerian state similarly turns people from other states into “outsiders”.

Thus, migration continues to challenge development thinking, and raises particular questions in social policy. Answers to these questions should be context-specific and take account of the diverse nature of migration and groups involved, and one should never under-estimate their deeply political nature. A key priority for future social policy research lies in highlighting the mechanisms through which social policy can enhance access by discriminated migrant groups, and indeed include them as citizens. In the social policy literature there is a strong emphasis on highlighting win-win situations of addressing equity and efficiency – there is a clear need to extend this to a discussion on migrants.

SECTION 6: CONCLUSION

This paper has described the complexity of analysing migration and poverty. It has highlighted general themes within a very broad literature, on a very diverse topic, with the intention of trying to locate gaps in knowledge. Much is known about the motives of migrants and their contexts, especially if we are willing to view them as a largely homogenous mass, within the black box of the household. But less is known once we shift our focus on poor households specifically, and on intra-household processes, in terms of gender and generations. Empirical findings about linkages between migration and poverty differ greatly, and there is a sense – although difficult to prove at this stage – that there may be a causal link between the simplifying theoretical assumptions and conflicting empirical results.

Most analysts tend to agree that migration emerges out of differences in opportunity, and that workers respond to opportunities generally (though there will be degrees of integration of labour markets—one of the problems of migration studies is that they focus on migrants and less on the wider environment). “Migration optimists” argue that where migration does not lead to reduction in disparities, this tends to be due to barriers for migrants, such as international borders or labour market inefficiencies. “Migration pessimist” emphasize that there is very little empirical evidence that shows that migration does in fact lead to reduction in disparities.

²² Christiansen et al. 2005 show how definitions of children and families used by international agencies matter for, and can conflict with local realities.

The conclusions of optimists and pessimists are not necessarily incompatible. Migration has different impacts in different contexts. For example, evidence on remittances shows that context matters greatly in both their amount and use. This may be key to whether migration reduces disparities, as the same absent conditions that would make remittances lead to development were the reasons migrants left in the first place. Migration should be seen within a larger strategy of poverty reduction, not as an optimistic “solution” but nor as a pessimistic “problem”. Unfortunately current gaps in knowledge – including in the social policy literature – do not help find the right balance.

For example, the effects of temporary worker schemes on development at origin have been framed mainly in terms of remittances or brain drain. This leaves the problem of what children and others left behind do where significant proportions of the population of prime productive age have migrated, and it raises questions around what sustainable social policy can mean when production and tax collection occurs elsewhere.

Debates on remittances sometimes suggest that private flows can be seen as substitutes for public investment in quality services. This fails to recognise that children’s development and other social policy has “public goods” characteristics. An important dimension of equity is across generations, but there are no public finance mechanisms to ensure that all children, with or without migrant parents, have a fair share in increased global wealth from migration. Current debates around “brain drain” hardly capture these issues, such as the possibility of linking flows of international aid and regional fiscal transfers in the opposite direction to the transfer of human capital.

There is insufficient appreciation that children affect migration, and are affected by migration, through their roles within families and communities. The problem is partly structural, rooted in definitions of childhood around learning and play that ignore children’s social-economic contributions and evolving capacities. On the one hand, migration can sometimes infringe and endanger the enjoyment of children’s rights, but on the other hand, ignoring poor children’s early-responsibilities, lack of opportunities, aspirations, and agency, could over-simplify their reality. A balance needs to be located somewhere between ignoring independent child migrants (often the current situation), adopting a rescue-mentality (partly linked to assuming that children who move independently are always trafficked) and indifferently treating children like adult migrants (without recognising the distinctiveness of childhood). One of the biggest challenges in this is an over-focus on movement per se as a cause of children’s vulnerabilities, at the expense of underlying social-economic disadvantages (that influence why and which children migrate independently, and their social-economic exclusion at destination).

Social policy vis-à-vis migrants is a double-edged sword. There are practical ways in which social policies can protect and support migrants. At the same time, social policies define citizenship, produce forms of inclusion, and hence inevitably exclusion. The key question is for social policies toward migration to be sensitive to its processes, complex nature and structure, distinctiveness of particular groups, and its inherent political nature.

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